

CLAIMS

1. An object-oriented computer system, including:

two or more class loaders for loading program class
5 files into the system; and

a constraint checking mechanism so that where a first
class file loaded by a first class loader makes a symbolic
reference to a second class file loaded by a second class
loader, said symbolic reference including a descriptor of a
10 third class file, the constraint enforces that the first
and second class files agree on the identity of the third
class file,

said constraint checking mechanism including means for
creating a data structure for recording a constraint as an
15 asymmetric relationship between two class loaders, wherein
said data structure includes, for a class loader which has
loaded a class file that contains a symbolic reference to
another class file, a first parameter denoting the class
file which is identified by a descriptor in said symbolic
20 reference, and a second parameter denoting the class loader
which loaded said another class file.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein said data structure
further includes a third parameter denoting the object
25 reference to said class file which is identified by a
descriptor in said symbolic reference, as loaded by the
class loader with which the data structure is associated.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein said data structure further includes a fourth parameter, denoting the object reference to said class file which is identified by a descriptor in said symbolic reference, as loaded by said class loader which loaded said another class file.

4. The system of claim 3, further comprising means for comparing said third and fourth parameters, to identify a constraint violation if they do not match.

5. The system of claim 2, further comprising means for copying said third parameter into a data structure associated with said class loader which loader said another class file.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein each class loader has its own cache, and the data structure for a class loader is stored in the cache for that class loader.

7. A method of operating an object-oriented computer system, including two or more class loaders for loading program class files into the system and a constraint checking mechanism so that where a first class file loaded by a first class loader makes a symbolic reference to a second class file loaded by a second class loader, said symbolic reference including a descriptor of a third class file, the constraint enforces that the first and second

class files agree on the identity of the third class file,
said method comprising the steps of:

identifying the need for a constraint between said
first and second class loaders in respect of said third
class file;

creating a data structure for each of said first and
second class loaders; and

setting a pointer from the data structure for the
first class loader to the data structure for the second
class loader to identify the latter as being the constraint
parent.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the data structure for
each of said first and second class loaders is stored in a
cache associated with the respective class loader.

9. The method of claim 7, further comprising the steps
of:

resolving said third class file to a first object
reference by the first class loader;

copying the first object reference from the third
class file to the data structure for the second class
loader;

resolving said third class file to a second object
reference by the second class loader; and

checking that said first and second object references are identical to ensure that said constraint has not been violated.

10. The method of claim 7, further comprising the steps of:

resolving said third class file to a first object reference by the second class loader;

resolving said third class file to a second object reference by the first class loader; and

responsive to detecting that said pointer is set , checking that said second and first class references are identical to ensure that said constraint has not been violated.

11. A method of operating an object-oriented computer system, including two or more class loaders for loading program class files into the system and a constraint checking mechanism so that where a first class file loaded by a first class loader makes a symbolic reference to a second class file loaded by a second class loader, said symbolic reference including a descriptor of a third class file, a constraint enforces that the first and second class files agree on the identity of the third class file, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a data store for asymmetrically recording the constraint between said first and second class loaders in respect of said third class file;

resolving a reference to said third class file by said first class loader;

identifying from the data store the existence of said constraint between said first and second class loaders in respect of said third class file; and

updating the data store to indicate the reference to said third class file as resolved by the first class loader.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein said data store comprises a first data structure in a cache associated with the first class loader, and a second data structure in a cache associated with the second class loader.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the asymmetric recording of a constraint comprises a pointer from said first data structure to said second data structure.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein said step of updating comprises updating said second data structure with the reference.